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ABSTRACT

According to the Uniqueness theory, individuals characteristically desire to perceive themselves as moderately different from others. The effects of need for uniqueness and uniqueness relevant feedback on mood, recall, and perceptions of peers and the self were examined in 60 college students who participated in a two-part study. In part one of the study, subjects attempted to memorize 52 trait terms, completed a 30-item attitude survey, indicated how similar they felt their attitudes were to those of the average college student, and recalled as many of the 52 trait terms as possible. Subjects also indicated the extent to which each of the 52 traits applied to them personally and to the average college student, and completed the Need for Uniqueness Scale (NUS). At session two, subjects attempted to memorize the 52 traits plus an additional 16 traits and considered the attitude survey completed in the first session. The survey now contained uniqueness relevant feedback on subjects' responses. Subjects then recalled and rated traits as in session one. NUS scores were used to classify subjects as high or low in need for uniqueness. The findings partially support the prediction that uniqueness-relevant feedback induces a negative affective state in recipients. The prediction that uniqueness-relevant feedback is more likely to cause modification in attributions of peers rather than in self-attributions also received some support. Further evidence that the NUS is valid was generated by the investigation. (NRB)

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THE EFFECTS OF NEED FOR UNIQUENESS AND UNIQUENESS RELEVANT FEEDBACK ON MOOD, RECALL, AND PERCEPTIONS OF PEERS AND THE SELF

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ABSTRACT

One of the major premises and a logical extension of Uniqueness Theory was tested in a two-part study involving sixty undergraduate Psychology students who were randomly assigned to three feedback conditions (Uniqueness-Depriving, Uniqueness-Enhancing, and No Feedback). Participants completed the Need for Uniqueness Scale and were classified as being high or low in the Need for Uniqueness. The findings partially supported the prediction that uniqueness-relevant feedback induces a negative affective state in recipients. The prediction that uniqueness-relevant feedback is more likely to cause modification in attributions of peers rather than in self-attributions also received some support. Further evidence that the Need for Uniqueness Scale is valid was generated by the investigation.

The Effects of Need for Uniqueness and Uniqueness Relevant Feedback On Mood, Recall, and Perceptions of Peers and the Self

The major premises of Uniqueness Theory were initially outlined by H. L. Fromkin in 1968. According to this theory, individuals characteristically possess a desire to perceive themselves as being moderately different (neither extremely similar nor extremely dissimilar) from others. The strength of this desire, however, is postulated to differ across individuals. That is, some individuals (referred to by Fromkin as persons with a strong need for uniqueness) have a stronger desire to perceive themselves as being moderately different or unique while other individuals (those with a weaker need for uniqueness) are less concerned with perceiving themselves as being moderately different from others.

Fromkin also theorized that environmental feedback which is inconsistent with the perception that one is moderately different (i.e., information indicating extreme similarity or dissimilarity from others) would sensitize individuals to opportunities restore the perception of being moderately different and may cause them to engage in behaviors which would restore the image of being moderately (dis)similar. Fromkin discusses two different types of environmental feedback and two different types of reactions to such feedback. Uniqueness-depriving feedback, according to Fromkin, is feedback which indicates that the individual is extremely similar to (e.g. indicating that one is virtually identical to or a "clone" of) others. According to Fromkin, the reception of this type of feedback should influence individuals to be sensitive to opportunities to engage in behaviors which would make them "stand out"

from the crowd (e.g. unusual or "non-conformist" behaviors). In contrast, the reception of uniqueness-enhancing feedback (i.e. feedback indicating that one is extremely dissimilar from others) should influence individuals to engage in actions that would make them appear to "blend in" with the crowd (e.g. very "conformist" behaviors).

Effects of Uniqueness Relevant Feedback on Mood

Fromkin additionally hypothesized that the reception of either uniqueness-depriving or uniqueness-enhancing feedback induces a negative affective state which, at least in part, is responsible for influencing individuals to engage in behaviors geared to restore the perception of being only moderately different from others. According to Snyder and Fromkin (1980), engaging in conformist or nonconformist behaviors may be a mechanism for dispelling or alleviating the negative affective state induced by such feedback. Several studies have suggested that the reception of uniqueness depriving feedback induces a negative mood state (e.g. Fromkin, 1968, 1972; Ganster, McCuddy, and Fromkin, 1977), but only a single test of the hypothesis that the reception of uniqueness-enhancing feedback induces a similar negative affective state can be found in the literature (i.e. Ganster et al., 1977). A weakness common to all of these investigations concerning uniqueness-relevant feedback and mood is the use of a self-report questionnaire (the Nowlis and Green (1965) Mood Adjective Checklist) rather than more compelling measures of the existence of negative mood state. Hence, while there is some evidence that uniqueness-relevant feedback and mood are systematically related, the low number of studies and instruments used cast doubt on the generalizability of the findings.

Effects of Uniqueness Relevant Feedback on Behavior

Support for the other major assumptions of Fromkin's initial formulation of Uniqueness Theory has been provided by a fair number of studies, the majority of which have been reviewed by Snyder and Fromkin, (1980). The reception of uniqueness-depriving feedback has been shown to influence individuals to put more physical distance between themselves and others (Snyder and Endelman, 1979), to conform less to the expressed views of experimental confederates on art judgement (Weir, 1971) or dot-estimation (Duval, 1972) tasks, to avail themselves of the opportunity to engage in unusual or "scarce" experiences (Fromkin, 1970), to modify their expressed opinions on an attitude questionnaire (Weir, 1971), and to generate significantly more uses for a common object (Fromkin, 1968) than individuals not receiving such feedback. Evidence that the reception of uniqueness enchancing feedback will systematically influence individual behavior in the manner hypothesized by Fromkin (1968) has not been addressed by most of the studies cited above. In fact, only the results of the Duval (1972) experiment suggest that individuals may become more likely to conform to the judgments or behaviors of others after being told that they are extremely different from others.

While all of these findings would seem to indicate that uniqueness-relevant feedback may systematically influence behavior, it must be noted that the external validity of the results of all of these investigations are suspect. In each study, some variation on the traditional conformity paradigm was used to demonstrate that uniqueness relevant feedback may systematically influence behavior in the manner

outlined by Fromkin (1980). Case and Rosen (1984) presented evidence that a similar pattern of findings may not be found in less behaviorally-constrained situations, outside the conformity paradigm (i.e., situations in which research participants have a freer choice of behavioral responses to the uniqueness-relevant feedback they receive). Hence, it is still uncertain whether uniqueness relevant feedback systematically influences recipient behavior in natural social settings.

Individual Differences in Strength of Need for Uniqueness

In order to detect differences between individuals in their need to perceive themselves as unique, Fromkin and his colleagues developed the Need for Uniqueness (NUS) Scale (Fromkin & Lipshifts, 1976; Snyder and Fromkin, 1977). Snyder and Fromkin (1980), have reviewed the results of several studies which seem to indicate the construct validity of the scale. The strongest support for the validity of the NUS, however, has been provided by Case and Rosen (1984). These investigators found that the self-perceptions (and personality ratings provided by fellow group discussants) of persons classified as being strong or weak in the need for uniqueness (on the basis of NUS scores) were highly consistent with Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) description of each type of person. That is, there was great consistency between the self-perceptions (provided by individual research participants), personality ratings (provided by fellow group discussants) and Snyder and Fromkin's descriptions for each type of person. Furthermore, Case and Rosen found that NUS scores were not correlated with scores of other commonly used personality measures (e.g. extraversion, locus of control, public-private self-consciousness, and self-monitoring). Thus, it seems that Fromkin and his colleagues

have in fact succeeded at developing an instrument which is capable of detecting individual differences in the strength of the need for uniqueness.

In sum, empirical evidence has been generated for each of the major assumptions of uniqueness theory although stronger and more substantial support has been found for Fromkin's predictions about the influence of uniqueness-depriving feedback than for his predictions about the effects uniqueness-enhancing feedback on mood and behavior. Several studies also suggest that there are individual differences in extent to which individuals perceive themselves as unique and that these differences may be measured by the Need for Uniqueness Scale.

Purpose of Current Investigation

The present investigation sought to further explore the influence of uniqueness relevant feedback on recipient mood and to determine if alterations in those mood states are associated with systematic alterations in self-perceptions and/or the perceptions of peers. As noted previously, one of the major weaknesses of the studies which indicate that uniqueness-relevant feedback may temporarily induce a negative mood state was the invariant use of a self-report mood checklist. The criticisms of self-report measures are well known and for that reason will not be elaborated on here. To get around these criticisms, we decided to employ a very different type of index which was first utilized by Isen, Stalker, Clark, and Karp (1978). These researchers exposed subjects to a list of 36 words, subsequently induced a positive or negative mood, and finally asked them to recall the list. They found that the recall of positively toned words on the list was

directly related to the positivity of the mood that was induced. From these results, we predicted that if uniqueness relevant feedback (depriving or enhancing) induces a negative mood state, it should systematically influence the recall of previously encoded (memorized) positively-toned words. We felt that if we observed a pattern of findings (on a recall task) similar to those obtained by Isen et al. (1978), that we would have found additional and somewhat more compelling support for Fromkin's assertion that uniqueness relevant feedback induces a negative mood state in feedback recipients.

We also wished to address of the question of the effect that this feedback-induced negative mood may have on self-perceptions and the perceptions of others. We reasoned that the reception of uniqueness relevant feedback may negatively influence the self-esteem or self-image of individuals and make them less likely to attribute positive traits to themselves than they might normally (i.e. there may be less of the normal a bias toward positive self-attributions after the reception of uniqueness-relevant feedback). We also felt that is was conceivable that the feedback and/or resulting mood state may influence recepients to view others more negatively than they would normally because Willis (1965) had shown that threats to self-esteem may be associated with the derogation of others. In sum, we felt that uniquess relevant feedback could produce systematic alterations in self-perceptions, perceptions of others, or both.

A review of the literature prompted us to predict that uniqueness relevant feedback was most likely to cause modifications in the perceptions of others. This prediction was based largely on Markus's (1977) discussion of the enduring nature of self-schemata and on the results of Rodrigues' (1967) Balance Theory (Newcomb, 1968) experiments

which indicated that individuals are less confident about the characteristics of others than about their own characteristics because the former is based on secondary information while the latter is based on primary information. Rodrigues found a greater tendency for individuals to modify perceptions of others than self-perceptions.

Method

Subjects and Design

A total of 60 male and female introductory psychology students were recruited to participate in a two-part study which they were told focused on the relationship between attitudes, personality, and person perception. They were randomly assigned to one of three feedback conditions (Enhanced, No Feedback, or Deprived).

Procedure: Session 1

Upon arriving for the first part of the experiment in groups of four, participants were provided with an overview of the procedures and a bogus cover story suggesting that a two-part experiment was needed to assess the relationship between personality and the stabilty of attitudes and impressions of oneself and others. The experimenter then gave participants a sheet on which 52 (26 positive, 26 negative) trait terms were listed. After a 5 per minute memorization period, participants were given 15 minutes to complete 30 item attitude survey with a seven-point Likert type response format and to respond to two questions concerning how similar their attitudes were to those of the average college student. Following this 15 minute period, participants were asked to write down as many of the 52 trait terms as they could remember; they were given 5

minutes for this recall task. Next, participants were asked to indicate on 7-point rating scales (where: 1 = does not describe at all, 7 = describes extremely well), the extent to which each of the 52 traits they had been asked to memorize applied to them personally and to the average college student. Finally, participants were asked to complete a battery of personality inventories which included the Need for Uniquences (NUS) Scale.

Procedure: Session II

Upon returning for the second part of the experiment, participants were provided with a 5-minute memorization period for a list of 68 trait terms (34 positive, 34 negative) in which the 52 terms used in Session 1 were embedded. At the end of the memorization period they were given 15 minutes to consider the attitude survey which they had completed in Session 1 and to complete a manipulation check questionnaire. These survey forms now contained the unqiueness relevant feedback indicating that their opinions on 25 of the 30 issues were either virtually identical (uniqueness-depriving) or radically different (uniqueness-enchancing) from those of other college students (This is the common way in which uniqueness relevant feedback has been delivered in the studies discussed in the introduction; as in most of these studies, participants in this investigation were told that the average opinion shown for each item was based on a sample of more than 10,000 other college students. Of course, no average response was indicated on the forms returned to no feedback subjects). After this 15 minute feedback exposure and manipulation check period, participants were given 5 minutes to recall, again in writing, the trait terms they had been asked to memorize at the beginning of the session. Finally, as in Session 1 they

were asked to indicate the extent to which, each of the trait terms on the list they had been asked to memorize applied to both themselves and the average student. A thorough debriefing followed this final experimental task.

Results

A median split on the NUS scores was used to classify individual participants as being either high or low in the need for uniqueness. The median score for this sample was 102 wnich is two points higher than the norm reported by Snyder and Fromkin (1980). This split plus the three feedback conditions allowed for 3x2 ANOVAs to be performed on most dependent measures.

The first ANOVAs were performed on three manipulation check questions. All revealed only a highly significant ($p < .0001$) main effect for feedback and it was apparent that the feedback had altered perceptions of the similarity in the expected directions. That is, recipients of depriving feedback reported the highest degree of similarity between themselves and the average student, recipients of enhancing feedback reported the least degree of similarity and also consistent with uniqueness theory, recipients of no feedback reported being moderately (dis)similar from other college students.

Two analyses were performed to test the hypothesis that uniqueness depriving and uniqueness enhancing feedback would induce a negative mood and lowered recall of positive trait terms relative to no feedback subjects. The first analysis investigated differences in the recall measure taken during Session 2 immediately after subjects had been exposed to the feedback. Because of differences in the total number of

items recalled by individuals, the proportion of recalled traits that were evaluatively positive in tone was used as the dependent measure. While no significant main effects or interactions were revealed by this ANOVA, mean proportions were in the predicted direction with subjects receiving both types of feedback recalling a smaller proportion of positive traits then did no feedback subjects.

Because recall measures were taken during each session of the experiment, it was possible to assess whether feedback reception was associated with systematic changes in the proportion of positive trait terms recalled prior to and after the reception of uniqueness feedback. In order to carry out this analysis, change scores (proportion of positive terms recalled prior to feedback minus proportion of positive terms recalled subsequent to feedback) were subjected to a 3x2 ANOVA. Only a significant main effect for feedback was observed, $F(2,54)=3.64$, $p. < 04$. The actual changes are depicted in Figure 1. It is apparent that the predicted decrements in recall of positively-toned terms occurred, but it is also apparent that the statistical main effect is due to the dramatic drop observed in recall of recipients of uniqueness depriving feedback. The reasons why depriving feedback recipients showed the highest recall level during Session 1 is unknown. Differential treatment of these participants by the experimenter is not an explanation for these differences, because the experimenter was blind to the feedback conditions of participants during Sessions 1 and 2.

In summary, our findings suggest that uniqueness-depriving and uniqueness-enhancing feedback may indeed induce a negative mood state. The decrements in the recall of positively-toned terms from pre- to post-feedback and the fact that recipients of both types of feedback recalled proportionally fewer positively toned terms subsequent to

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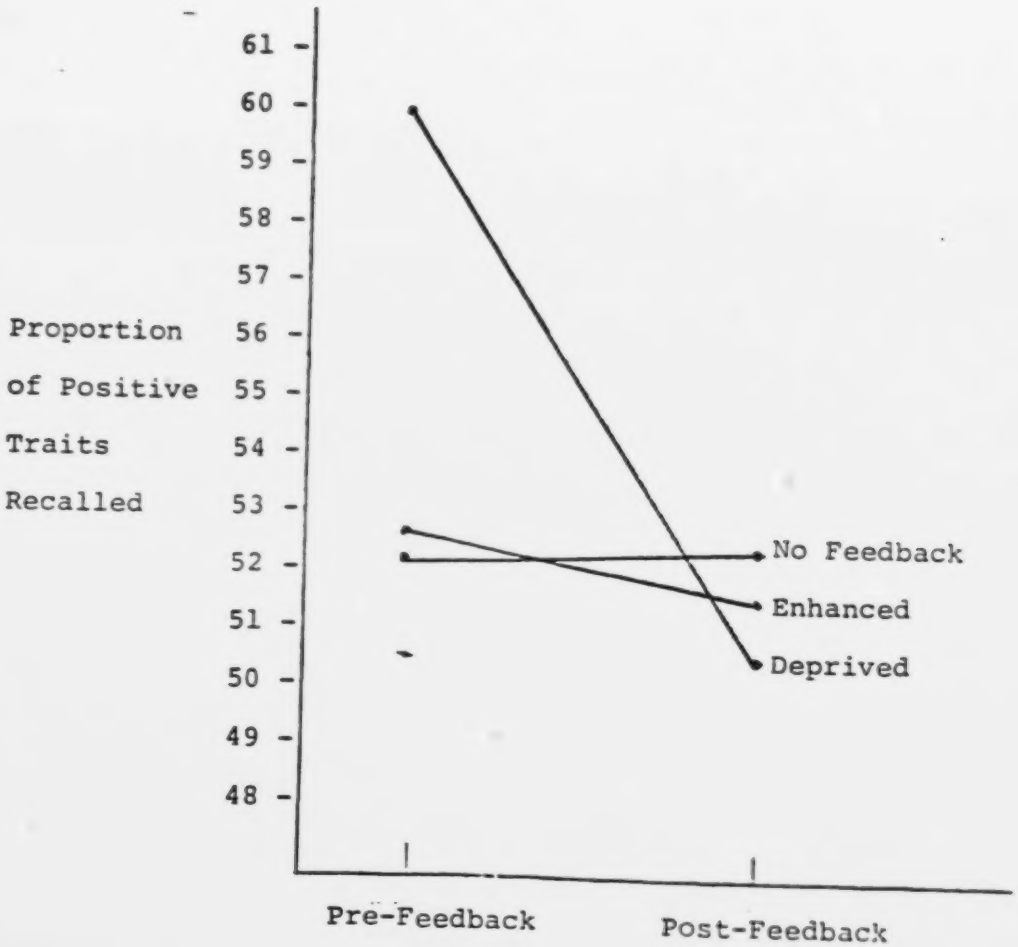
FIGURE 1

Changes in the Proportions of Evaluatively Positive Traits Recalled by Participants in the Feedback Conditions from Pre- to Post-feedback



feedback reception are consistent with the findings of the Isen et al. (1978) study. Our findings thus add further support for the notion that mood states may systematically alter memory, and are consistent with other investigations which seem to indicate that uniqueness relevant feedback produces a negative emotional state. The absence of a need for uniqueness main effect or a feedback x NUS interaction would also suggest that uniqueness relevant feedback may induce a negative affective state irregardless of relevant personality differences.

The second hypothesis addressed by this investigation was that uniqueness relevant feedback and any resultant negative affective state would systematically alter the perceptions of peers vis à vis the self. More specifically, we expected feedback recipents to show more extensive modifications in the trait descriptions of the average student than in trait descriptions of themselves. The first test of this hypothesis focused on the average distance reported between the "profile" of the average student and that provided for the self.

In Session 1, participants indicated the extent to which they believed each of the 52 traits used in the memory task was descriptive of both themselves and the average college student. In session 2, this same task was repeated subsequent to feedback reception using a 68 item list in which the 52 traits used in session 1 were embedded. Hence, both prior to and after feedback, it was possible to determine the observed distance on each of 52 trait dimensions between the self-rating and that provided for the average student. The sum of the observed distances across the 52 traits used in both sessions was used as a proxy for the distance between the trait profiles of the self and the average student for each time period (i.e. prior to and after feedback reception). Change scores for distance between the trait profiles were generated for

each subject by subtracting the sum of the observed distances between self and average student ratings prior to feedback from the post-feedback sum.

When these change scores were subjected to a 3x2 ANOVA, a marginally significant main effect for feedback was found, $F(2,54)=2.75$, $p<.073$. Figure 2 depicts the nature of the main effect and it is clear that the average distance between the self and average student profiles narrowed from pre to post-feedback. However, the greatest modification occured in total observed distance for recipients of depriving feedback ($M=-9.9$) and the least modification occured for recipients of enhancing feedback ($M=-2.55$). No feedback subjects showed a mean change of -3.00.

It may also be observed in Figure 2 that the mean total distance between self and average student varied across feedback conditions prior to feedback. The ANOVA performed on the pre-feedback sums of total observed distance (and a second ANOVA on the post-feedback sums) showed no significant feedback main effect. These findings would seem to indicate that uniqueness relevant feedback is systematically related to the extent of convergence between the profiles of the self and the average student.

The ANOVAs performed on the pre-feedback and post-feedback observed distance measures tended to indicate systematic differences due to NUS scores. While the main effect of NUS on total observed distance prior to feedback failed to reach traditional significance levels, $F(1,59)=2.11$, $p<.16$, subsequent to feedback a significant difference was observed $F(1,59)=4.26$, $p<.05$. As may be observed in Figure 3, this significant post-feedback difference results from a relatively larger pre to post-feedback change for subjects with low NUS scores. These profile differences are largely consistent with Snyder and Fromkin's (1980)

FIGURE 2

Changes in the Total Distances Between Self and Average Student Profiles for Participants in the Three Feedback Conditions

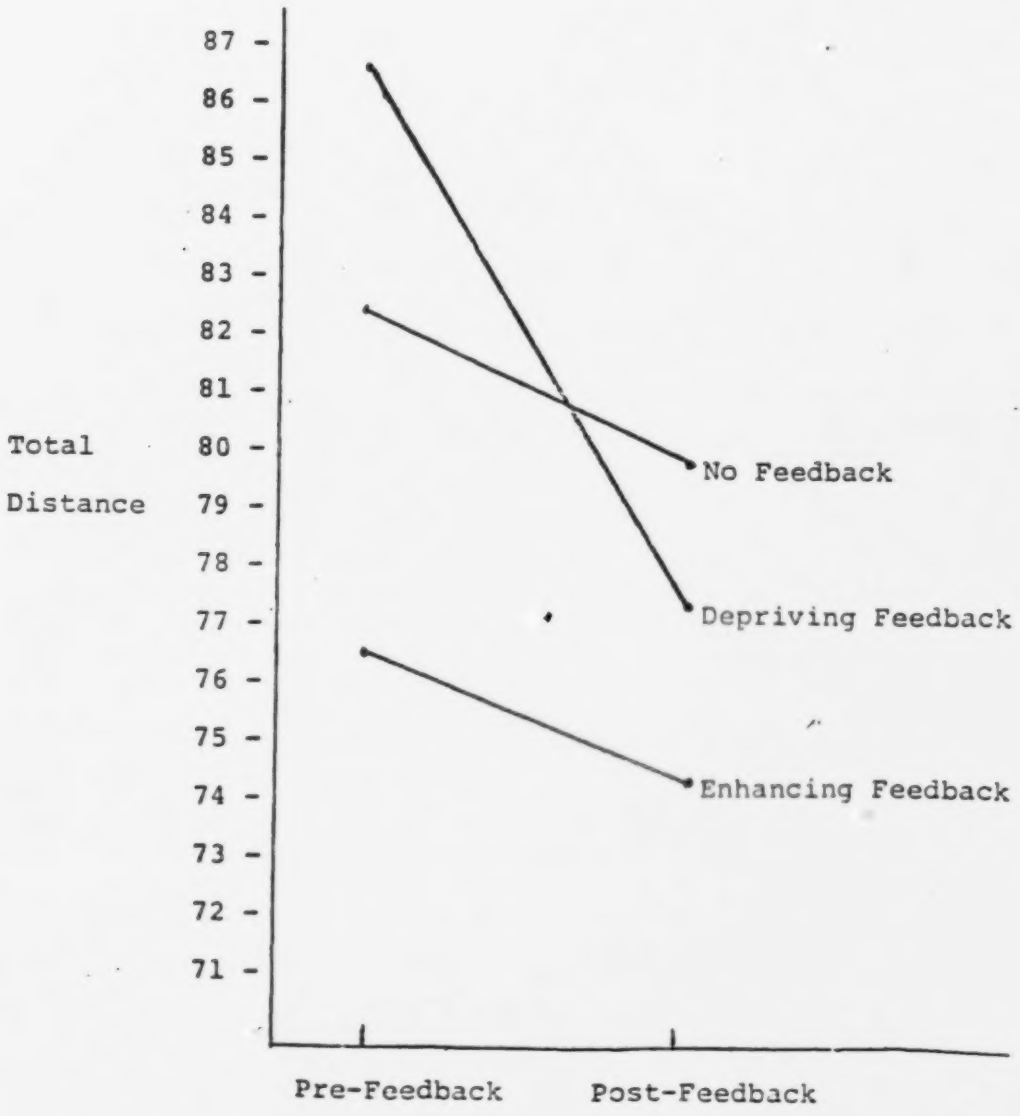
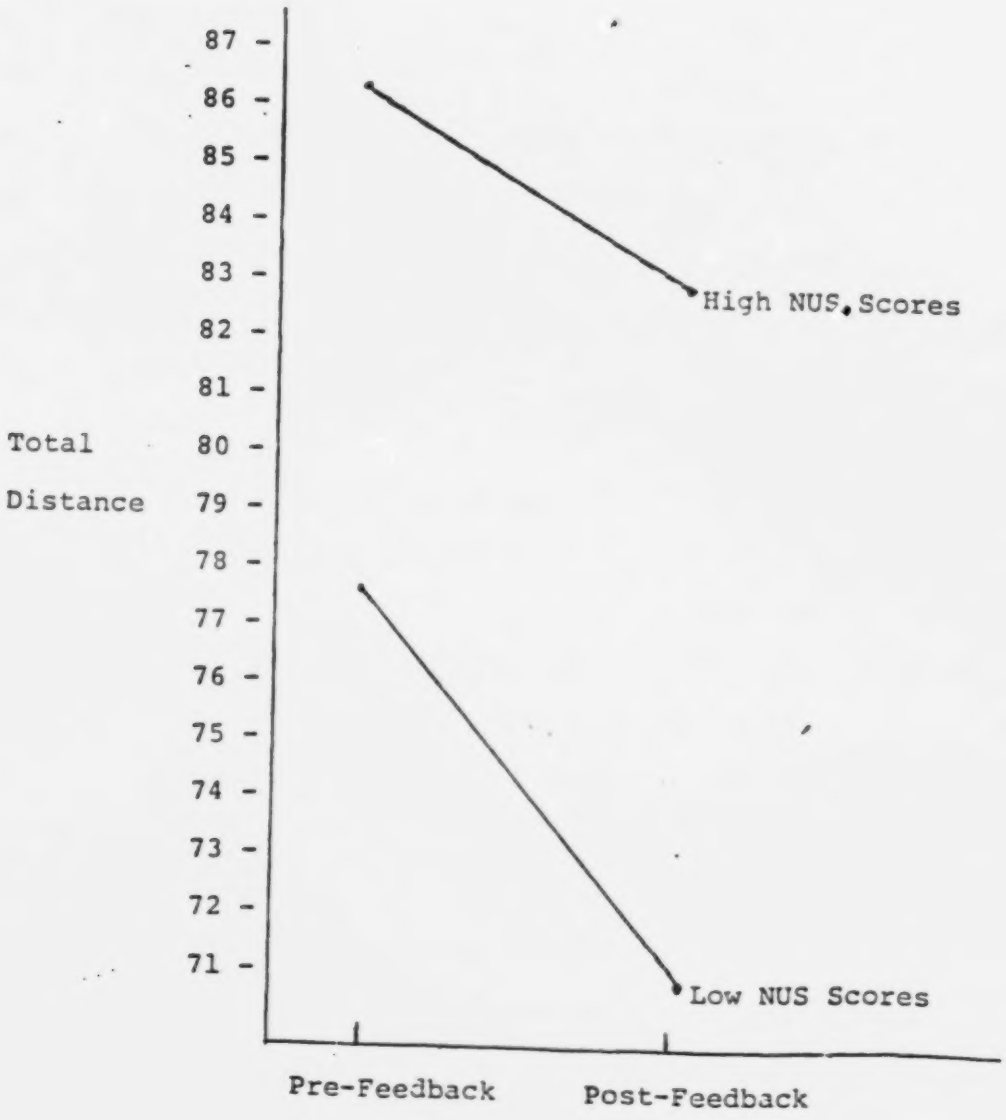


FIGURE 3

Changes in the Total Distances Between Self and Average Student Profiles for Participants with High and Low NUS Scores



assertion that persons with high NUS scores (or a stronger need for uniqueness) perceive themselves as being less similar to peers than do inividuals with low NUS scores (persons with a weaker need to perceive themselves as unique). The differences observed in Figure 3 adds further support to the notion that the Need for Uniqueness Scale is valid measure of individual differences in the strength of the need for uniqueness.

The analyses described above would seem to indicate that the observed differences between the trait "profiles" of the self and the average student tended to converge from Session 1 to Session 2, but that uniqueness relevant feedback and need for uniqueness are both related to the extent of the overall convergence between those two profiles. There analyses indicate that there are systematic changes in the profiles provided for the self and the average student (thus suggesting that there may be some truth to the hypothesis that greater changes would be observed in the trait profile of the average student than in the trait profile for the self) but do not directly address the hypothesis or indicate the major locus of changes in profiles. In order to better address this hypothesis, another set of analyses were conducted. These were conducted on measures extracted from the 52 trait dimensions used in both sessions of the experiment. Specifically, analyses were performed on changes from pre to post-feedback in the total positivity (sum of the ratings on the seven point scales, where 1 = does not describe at all, 7 = describes very well) of the 26 positively toned traits and the total negativity of the 26 negatively toned traits. While the one-way ANOVA performed on these change scores showed no significant main effects for feedback, the mean changes were ordered in the predicted direction. These mean changes are depicted in Table 1. The consistency of these changes with the original predictions is probably best shown by comparing

Table 1

Average Change in Total Positivity or Negativity of Ratings for Self and the Average Student by Participants in The Three Feedback Conditions

Dimension	Deprived	Enhanced	No Feedback
Positive self	1.55	.55	2.85
Negative self	.10	-.45	-3.05
Mean Absolute Change for self	.875	.50	2.95
Positive-Average Students	-2.05	4.85	2.55
Negative-Average Students	-6.10	-3.60	-1.05
Mean Absolute Change for Average Students	4.075	4.225	1.80

the mean absolute differences for the self and for the average student (these were computed by determine the mean of the absolute values of the average changes in the total positivity and total negativity). It is quite clear that feedback recipients were more likely to make changes in the ratings of the average student than in those provided for the self. If a larger sample had shown this same pattern, it is probable that the means would be significantly different.

It may also be seen in Table 1 that the uniqueness relevant feedback does not necessarily result in a derogation of others. If this were the case we would have observed a decrease in the total positivity and/or an increase in the total negativity of the ratings of the average student. For both uniqueness deprived and enhanced subjects, there was a net increase in the positivity of the ratings of the average student.

Discussion

The findings of this experiment offer at least partial support for the hypotheses that were tested. There was some evidence that uniqueness relevant feedback, especially uniqueness-depriving feedback, induces a negative affective state in recipients. This was indicated by the significant drop from pre- to post-feedback in the proportion of evaluatively positive trait terms recalled by feedback recipients (particularly for depriving feedback recipients). This finding essentially replicated the pattern observed in the Isen et al. (1978) mood study. Hence, this investigation would seem to offer further evidence that uniqueness-relevant feedback induces a negative affect state in recipients and does so by using an index (i.e. recall decrement) that is less prone to general criticism than the self-report measures

that had been in previous investigations. However our study may indicate that some fine tuning of uniqueness theory may be needed in that our findings suggest that depriving feedback has a much more powerful impact on mood than does enhancing feedback. (Snyder & Fromkin (1980) have not explicitly suggested such differences).

Consistent with our second prediction, some evidence was provided that uniqueness-relevant feedback causes modifications in the trait profiles provided for the self and for the average student (see Figure 2) and that the primary locus of these changes is in the profile of the average student (see Table 1). A general convergence of the two profiles was observed from pre- to post-feedback but a much more dramatic convergence was observed for depriving feedback recipients. This may have been in direct response to the false feedback received by these participants indicating that they were attitudinally similar to the average student. In other words, a cognitive consistency explanation may apply for the observed differences. On the other hand, the negative affective state presumably induced by the feedback may have caused recipients to systematically modify their views of the average student by developing a more favorable impression of their typical peer rather than a more derogatory view as Willis' (1965) research might suggest. An increase in the favorability of the impression of the average peer may also be due to "similar to me" biases (e.g. Rand and Wexley, 1975; Wexley and Nemeroff, 1974) where individuals are rated more favorably because they are seen as similar to the rater in attitude, personality, background, etc. (i.e., if average student is highly similar to feedback recipient, as indicated by the feedback, the average student must be "worthy" of favorable ratings and a profile that is similar to that of the feedback recipient).

The main effect for NUS observed on the trait profiles (see Figure 3) tend to be consistent with Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) contention that persons with high NUS scores are more likely to describe themselves as unique (different from others) than are persons with low NUS scores. Subjects with high NUS scores in this experiment tended to provide self-profiles (both prior to and subsequent to feedback) that were more divergent from the profile they provided for the average student than did subjects with low NUS scores. Also, on the attitude survey completed during Session 1, participants with high NUS scores were significantly more likely to describe themselves as being attitudinally dissimilar from the average student. This finding is also consistent with the result of the Case and Rosen (1984) study. These profile and attitude survey differences seem to offer additional support for the validity of the Need for Uniqueness Scale.

General Implications of Current Study

Practically speaking, our results suggest that evaluators should be wary of the use of uniqueness relevant feedback. Informing individuals that they are extremely unusual or virtually identical to their peers shoud be handled with utmost care and sensitivity; otherwise, the evaluator may only succeed in putting the individual in a bad mood. Our study also suggests that individuals who receive uniqueness relevant feedback are more likely to change their views about the people they have been compared to than to modify their own self-image, that is, individuals are most likely to react to such feedback by changing their thinking about others rather than changing their thinking about themselves.

While the intent of evaluators in delivering such feedback may be to alter the self-image of the feedback recipient, our findings suggest that this is not an immediate consequence of uniqueness relevant feedback. Although the feedback is likely to elicit a negative emotional response (a bad mood), it does not seem to have an immediate impact on cognitions concerning the self.

Finally, our findings present additional support the the notion that the Need for Uniqueness Scale (NUS) may be used to defect differences in the extent to which individual perceive themselves to be unique or dissimilar from others. As the developers of the scale would predict, persons with higher scores on the scale show greater differences in the trait profiles they provided for themselves and the average college student than do persons with lower scale scores. This would seem to indicate that persons with high scores do indeed see themselves as being more different from the average peer than do persons with low scores. Hence, it is likely that the NUS may be practically employed to discover the extent to which individuals believe that they are different from others.

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